

Rev. Dr. Chris Montovino  
Matthew 11:25-30  
June 16, 2024

### Rest

Good morning. I am slowing getting back into gear after being gone for a whole month. It was such a blessing to spend some time in Spain with Karen and my girls, followed by two weeks of pilgrimage on the Camino de Santiago in with a group of pastors from all over the United States. I am still processing all that I experienced and I'm sure that in due time, you'll be sick of all of the sermon illustrations that I gathered on the trail.

Hiking is one thing. Pilgrimage quite another.

The Camino de Santiago was created in the 9th century as journey that pilgrims have made to the Cathedral of St James in Santiago de Compostela where tradition holds the remains of James, the brother of Jesus, are buried. Like the lines on a scallop shell which start at various places on the edge but converge to a single point at the end, there are many different routes of the Camino all leading to the same place. This is why the scallop shell is the symbol and identifying marker of the Camino trail. You follow either yellow arrows or scallop shell markers along the way. Walking pilgrims attach a white scallop shell on their backpacks as identifying symbols of their pilgrimage.

The Camino that I walked was along the Northern route, through the mountains of Northern Spain and the Basque Country. Skipping a middle section. And then picking up the route through Galicia to Santiago de Compostela. Our group covered a total of 165 miles, about the distance between Vancouver and Seattle. A trip that normally takes three hours at sixty five miles per hour, but almost two weeks at a walking pace.

One of the things that intrigued me most before doing the Camino was what would it be like to travel along in a manor and speed that Jesus did with his disciples...three miles per hour. This is what I found. You notice things more when you slow down. Birds chirping in the morning. Cow bells in alpine fields. The smell of jasmine on a neighbors fence. Fresh coffee from a little coffee shop. Beautiful window box flowers. Friendly faces of the people who's property you traverse. Green lush mountains. Crisp mountain air.

You know those small towns that you pass through while traveling in a car and wonder who ever lives here? Walking into such towns, you really notice those people. You are welcomed by those people. You rely on those people. You share life with those people.

When we walk, we aren't rushed. We are able to let life unfold, gently throughout the day, with no agenda. We simply needed to be in such a place before dinner later that day.

When we aren't rushed, we can linger. We can explore. We can be curious. We can rest.

In the scripture that Sarah asked us to feast upon today, Jesus had just sent his disciples out to the regions around Galilee where he was teaching and preaching. And he gave his disciples authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness. They were busy. Overwhelmed. But they also returned full of joy at what they were able to do. That's when Jesus spoke these words over his disciples.

I am going to read from Eugene Peterson's *The Message* which is a modern day paraphrasing of scripture. So instead of following along in your bibles, listen now to Jesus' words to us.

**25-26** Abruptly Jesus broke into prayer: "Thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth. You've concealed your ways from sophisticates and know-it-alls, but spelled them out clearly to ordinary people. Yes, Father, that's the way you like to work."

**27** Jesus resumed talking to the people, but now tenderly. "The Father has given me all these things to do and say. This is a unique Father-Son operation, coming out of Father and Son intimacies and knowledge. No one knows the Son the way the Father does, nor the Father the way the Son does. But I'm not keeping it to myself; I'm ready to go over it line by line with anyone willing to listen.

**28-30** "Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly."

Let us pray. Prayer of Illumination.

I have a confession to make. As I was trying to write this sermon, I was in a hurry. Because in less than 24 hours, I would be on a plane for Spain. There was so much to do. So many loose ends to tie up. Worship bulletins to check. Tea cups to return. Thank you notes to write. Last minute pastoral calls to be made and instructions given to staff. On top of that I was getting sick from the hurried pace of life and ministry I often allow myself to lead. In fact, I spent the first two weeks in Spain nursing a very bad cold.

And as I sat down to reflect on this text, I could hear the voice Jesus saying, “Just stop, Chris. Stop. You can’t share anything worthwhile with the state of your spirit. Let’s wait until you are on the trail. Alone. With me.

Walk with me. Talk with me. Listen to me. Learn from me. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. And then let’s see what freely bubbles up from your soul.

Just stop...”

So I did.

I stopped.

And I rested from my work.

This morning I want look at this concept of rest and explore several considerations. What does the bible say about rest? Why and when are we to rest? Why don’t we rest? And finally what what can we do to finally get some rest?

The Bible as a lot to say about rest in fact. In the Old and New Testaments, there are some 230 occurances of the word rest. Over 800 instances where the idea of rest is mentioned or discussed.

The Hebrew word for rest is nauch. It means to be still, to settle down, or to have rest.

The first place we see it is in Genesis 2 when God rested from the work of creation. “By the seventh day God had finished the work God had been doing; so the seventh day God rested from all God’s work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because God rested from the work of creating that God had done.”<sup>1</sup>

It’s not that God had to rest. God chose to rest in order to set a pattern for humanity that we likewise would need to rest. To put down our work. To leave our unfinished business behind and to trust that God would handle what we could not. When we rest, we leave it in God’s hands. When we chose not to rest, we essentially tell God that God can’t handle what concerns us. So we have to do it ourselves.

“Many people often think that taking a break will derail the momentum of our work but the research says otherwise. An article in the Harvard Business Review examines a prime benefit of taking breaks: they allow us to take a step back and make sure we’re accomplishing the right things in the right way. “Studies show we have a limited capacity for concentrating over extended time periods, and though we may not be practiced at recognizing the symptoms of fatigue, they unavoidably derail our work.” Rest plays a key component in how we work, and these breaks give us “goal reactivation.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 2:2-3

<sup>2</sup> Ron Friedman, “Schedule a 15-Minute Break Before You Burn Out,” Harvard Business Review (8-4-14)

Another study indicated that “True rest seems to be elusive for most Americans. Only one in seven adults (14 percent) set aside a day a week for rest. And on that one day a week, what do they do? Mostly, they work. Only one in five (19 percent) of this small group say they don't do any work at all.”<sup>3</sup>

Overall the Hebrew concept of rest involves peace, tranquility, and renewal.

In the New Testament, the Greek word for rest is *anapauo*. It means to refresh, revive or be at ease. It is also the word that Jesus used in the words of his that we just heard.

We rest from the weight of sin.

We rest from our work.

We rest from the trials and tribulations of this world.

And ultimately, we look forward to an eternal rest once this earthly life is over.

So the why of resting is quite simple. God rested. So we should rest as well. We weren't created to be the Ever Ready Bunny. We can't just keep going, and producing, and working. We must stop and rest. And if we don't, then our bodies and our relationships will cause us to come to a screeching halt...which is never a pleasant thing to experience.

When should we rest? Again, it seems quite simple. Every day. God put that rhythm into the cycle of creation. We sleep as a way to let our bodies and our minds recover and regroup from the burden's of the day. We take our thoughts captive and turn them over to God's protective care.

Psalm 4:8 says, “I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.”

Psalm 16:7 says, “I will praise the Lord, who counsels me, even at night my heart instructs me.”

So there is this sense that even as we sleep, God is at work to help us sort of the cares of our day.

One of the greatest helps I have discovered is the Lectio 365 App which provide both morning and evening devotions. These short 7-10 minute devotions were developed by Pete Greig from the 24/7 Prayer movement. I especially love the night time devotions because they help to set my heart at peace, my mind on the Lord, as I gently drift off to sleep. I just lay in bed, close my eyes, and let the Word of God wash over me as a gentle stream.

But for many of us, research shows that the average American is not resting when they sleep as they should. In fact people report waking up feeling well-rested only three mornings of the week. And a survey of 2,000 U.S. adults reports

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<sup>3</sup> Andy Crouch, *The Tech-Wise Family* (Baker Books, 2017), page 104 reposted on [PreachingToday.com](http://PreachingToday.com)

that the average person doesn't get any where near the quality or quantity of sleep they want.

“On average, Americans only get six hours of sleep on any given night, while a majority aspire to get eight or more in the new year (58%). Parents in particular claim to struggle with nighttime routines. Thirty-five percent of respondents who are parents say their nighttime routine suffers, with a similar percentage of parents sharing that they have trouble winding down before bed most of the week (34%).

It's not just parents, however, as two in three Americans (66%) report that they need a full two hours or more to wind down before being able to fall asleep. Respondents from the Northeast (38%) and “night people” (53%) are most likely to struggle with winding down.”<sup>4</sup>

Another time that we are to rest is weekly. Again, God created the week with a day of rest called the sabbath. As we heard in Genesis early, God rested as a pattern that we too should rest. Put our work down. Enjoy each other and creation. And leave the unfinished business of the world into God's hands.

I will confess that sabbath for our family has been tricky to establish. My sabbath day is different from my theirs. Since I work on Sunday, I choose to take my sabbath on Friday. On those days, I try not to do any church work...although I am not always good at maintaining those boundaries. With the exception of emergencies, I would appreciate that people not text, email, or call me on Friday and into Saturday. That way I can be rested and ready for Sunday morning until Thursday evening, when my sabbath begins.

But that is not the rhythm of my family. Their sabbath doesn't begin until Friday evening.

To be brutally honest, this is one of the hardest things about being in ministry. Ministry families, and that includes everyone who works and serves on Sunday mornings, don't have the luxury of having a two day weekend together every week unless we take vacation days. So that means that we can't just slip away for the weekend to get away like everyone else can do. That weight is burdensome, tiring.

The Greek word that Jesus used in our text for tired is *kopiao*. It means to work hard, to feel fatigued, to be wearied.

The Greek word for heavy burdened is *portizo*. It means to load up, to be overburdened with ceremony or spiritual anxiety.

Unless we honor the sabbath for the sabbath's sake, even the work of providing sabbath for everyone else, it can become tiring. A burden.

Another time when we are to rest is through a sabbatical every six years. In Leviticus 25:2-4 the Lord established this rhythm...“When you come into the land that I give you, the land shall keep a Sabbath to the Lord. For six years you shall

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<sup>4</sup> Chris Melore, “Tired nation: Average American wakes up well-rested only 3 days a week,” Study Finds (1-20-23) on [PreachingToday.com](http://PreachingToday.com)

sow your field, and for six years you shall prune your vineyard and gather in its fruits, but in the seventh year there shall be a Sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a Sabbath to the Lord.”<sup>5</sup>

This is why we have set a sabbatical requirement into the pastoral terms of call after every six years of continuous service. Having to produce day in and day out, week after week, year after year...takes a toll. As with the land, people in ministry can no longer produce they way they need to. So that we too need to be nourished and equipped so we can continue producing as needed.

But this pattern is often neglected in the secular world. How many of us work for companies that provide a paid sabbatical after so many years of service?

Teachers get one every summer because the demands of teaching are tough and our teachers need that rest in order to be geared up for another school year.

Sadly many of us don't get that rest until we retire after many years of corporate America wringing every bit of profit it can from our bodies and souls.

If you don't typically get a sabbatical, what would it be like to talk with your employer about giving you one? People who do come back energized, recharged, and refreshed. I know my sabbaticals has kept me in ministry. Some of my colleagues from the trip have never taken sabbaticals because their Presbyteries haven't instituted mandatory sabbatical policies and it shows. Many are tired. Worn out. Burned out on religion. Ready to leave the ministry and do something less taxing.

If we need rest why then don't we take it?

Part of it could be because of the culture that we are in. Our culture never rests. Right? Big cities like New York are known for never resting. Employers often text us with work related issues well into the night and sometimes even expect a response by early morning.

Part of it could be the way we are wired. Some people are just night owls and find that they are most productive when the rest of the world goes to sleep. Do we have any night owls among us?

Part of it could because of the habits we've created. Alcohol use before bed disrupts our sleep. Computer and phone screen time just before bed disrupts of our brain's ability to shut down before going to sleep. Lack of exercise or movement throughout the day could disrupt our sleep.

Part of it could be the cares of the world that keep us awake.

Part of it could be that we are disconnected from God and are seeking our rest in other things besides God. A famous passage in St. Augustine of Hippo's Confessions states, "You have made us for yourself, O God, and our heart is restless until we find our rest in you." Before Augustine became a follower of

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<sup>5</sup> Leviticus 25:2-4

Jesus, he sought his identity in earthly things. His career. His education. His sexuality. His friendships. And even his family. And none of those pursuits ever satisfied his heart, until he came home to God and found his true identity and rest in God and in God alone.

In our scripture this morning, Jesus invites us to try something different. “Come to me.” he said. “Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.”

This was what I longed for in my pilgrimage along the Camino de Santiago. Stepping out of the fast paced rhythm of ministry and seeing how Jesus did it slowly at three miles per hour.

I’ll close with one other thing that I loved about my time on Camino. The Spanish culture. They know how to rest. Every day from 2-5, businesses and restaurants shut down for siesta. A rest from the heat of the day. People go home. Have a meal with their families, and take naps. Then after siesta, they walk around the neighborhood and connect once again with family, and friends, the community in what is called a paseo. It seemed a much healthier and sustainable pace of life than our disconnected rat raced culture.

More like what Jesus invites us into today.

So I don’t know where we each are in our own seasons of rest or need for rest, but may we take Jesus’ words to heart. May we trust him. May we come to him and learn from him. And ultimately may we find our rest in him. For until we do so, we will be restless until we find our rest in him alone. Amen.